

The Stone of Salvation or Destruction

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the significance of the stone in the Bible, representing God's Son, Jesus Christ, and its role as a test of men's character, a stumbling block to unbelievers, and a symbol of destruction and ruin.

Scripture: Genesis 49:24, Deuteronomy 32:18, Deuteronomy 32:31, 1 Samuel 23:3, Psalm 28:1, Psalm 95:1, Isaiah 26:4, Isaiah 28:16, Matthew 21:44, 1 Peter 2:4

Topics: "Christ as the Cornerstone", "Rejection and Acceptance of Jesus"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores the multifaceted significance of the 'stone' in Matthew 21:44, emphasizing its role as a symbol of Christ. He discusses how this stone represents rejection, honor, stumbling, and ultimately destruction, urging listeners to consider their response to Christ. Bonar highlights that acceptance of this stone leads to salvation, while rejection results in eternal consequences. He calls for a personal evaluation of one's relationship with Jesus, the cornerstone of faith, and warns of the impending judgment for those who do not embrace Him. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of recognizing Christ's true value in our lives.

Transcript

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."--Matthew 21: 44.

What is there about the "stone" or the "rock," that makes God so often point to it, when speaking of Himself and of his Son? Many are the truths which cluster round it, or are wrapped up in it. It is one of these mines out of which one digs some of the most precious thoughts of God,--thoughts in which we sinners of earth have the chief share.

He gives us his own name as the "Rock of Israel" (1 Samuel 23:3), and his Son's name, as the "Stone of Israel" (Genesis 49:24). He speaks of Himself as the "Rock of Ages" (Isaiah 26:4), and of his Son as the "tried stone," the "precious cornerstone" (Isaiah 28:16). He calls Himself "the rock that begat us" (Deuteronomy 32:18), and his Son, "the living stone" (1 Peter 2:4).

He taught Israel to say, "Their rock is not as our Rock" (Deuteronomy 32:31); "neither is there any rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:2). He taught his believing ones to take up this as their song: "Unto thee will I cry O Lord, my Rock" (Psalm 28:1); "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 60:2); "Be thou my strong Rock" (Psalm 31:2). "God is the Rock of my heart" (Psalm 73:26, margin); "Make a joyful noise to the

Rock of our salvation" (Psalm 95:1).

It is plain, then, that God has much to say of this stone or rock, and it is His desire that we should learn the meaning of what He has said, and enter into his thoughts respecting it. He points us to this stone, and bids us look at it that we may see in it what He sees, and so may, at once, get the manifold benefits which it contains. For such is the nature of that stone, and such its virtues and benefits, that to enter into the mind of God concerning it, is to make these virtues and benefits our own.

One special aspect under which God asks us to look at this stone, is as a foundation-stone; and we need hardly say that it is to his only-begotten Son that he is pointing, when He says, "Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone (Isaiah 28:16, I Peter 2:6).

"On this rock," said the Lord, "will I build my church," pointing to Himself; just as He said at another time, "Destroy this temple, and in three days will I raise it up." Often is the "rock" or "stone" thus referred to in connection with Himself. The passage before us brings out four things in connection with this stone,--four aspects or bearings of it. These are as follow:--

I. It is the stone of rejection. Probably there was some stone which Solomon's builders or architects set aside at first as unfit, which was afterwards found to be altogether suitable. This is used as a symbol for Messiah's rejection by Israel. He was meant to be the foundation-stone, the cornerstone; but Israel would have none of Him as such. He was not the stone of their choice or approval. He was "disallowed of men" (1 Peter 2:4). He is the rejected stone; the rejected Saviour; the rejected king. He is rejected specially by the builders, not only by the common workmen. Everything connected with Him has been rejected; He came unto His own and his own received Him not; He was despised and rejected of men; He was one in whom men saw no beauty. It is at this point that God is standing and presenting Christ to the sons of men. What think ye of Christ? Do you receive Him or reject Him? Decide. This stone is the test or touchstone in the real character and standing of men. Man's estimate of this stone is the ground of God's estimate of Israel or of humanity. On this everything is made to turn. What is this stone to you, O man? What is its value in your eyes? This is about the last test that man thinks of in determining character; but with God it is the first; or rather, it is both the first and the last. He who accepts God's estimate of this stone is saved; he who rejects it, and prefers his own,--takes the estimate of the builders,--is lost. On our estimate of this stone our eternity turns.

II. The stone of honour. God has made it the head of the corner. God reverses man's estimate of this wonderful stone. He declares it worthy of the highest and most honourable place. This place he has assigned to it. The sign or emblem of man's rejection was the cross; the sign of God's acceptance and honour was the throne of the majesty in the heavens. In the one, we see man's contempt, in the other, God's admiration and approval. It was as a temple-stone that it was rejected; it was as a temple-stone that it was honoured. It was the last thing that man would have thought of in building his temple; it is the first thing that God thinks of; he makes it both foundation stone and cornerstone. It was the stone that man could do without in his temple; it was that without which God could not build his temple; nay, without which there could not be any temple at all. "God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name." This exaltation to the highest point of the universe, of that which man had tried to cast down to the lowest, is the thing which shews this pre-eminence to be truly divine; altogether superhuman; something which God only could accomplish. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Surely this is the man whom the Lord delighteth to honour.

III. The stone of stumbling. It is called by two peculiar and somewhat similar names; "a stone of stumbling," or a stone against which people strike and injure themselves (a stone of offence, or a rock over which people trip). This stone has both of these characteristics. These two things are comprised in our Lord's expression, "shall be broken." These are the two ways in which men are affected by it just now; for these two things refer plainly to the present dispensation,--the state of things since Messiah came, which is to continue till He comes again. These are the two ways in which unbelief shews itself; it strikes against, or it stumbles over the stone; it resists and assails it to its own injury; or it makes such mistakes concerning it, that it upsets the man. For all unbelief either denies the cross or makes it void. It is thus that the human race (not Israel only) is brought into contact with this stone; this Messiah; Jesus of Nazareth. How many in the present day are dashing themselves against it, and so perishing by bold rejection? How many are refusing to believe simply what God has told us about it,--either adding something of their own to it, or taking something from it?--and so, with the name of Jesus on their lips, missing the pardon, and the life, and the glory which He came to bring. They are not satisfied with Jesus as He is; with the cross as it is; or at least they imagine that Jesus cannot accept them as they are, and that the cross cannot avail them as they are. So they would wait, and work, and pray, and feel, and repent, and add one thing to another, to make the Saviour sufficient, and the blood effectual, for them. They shrink from taking Jesus as He is; they shrink from accepting His fullness as they are. Jesus, "the Son of God," the "Saviour of the world," the "receiver of sinners," the "seeker of the lost," is not to them what the Father represents Him. There is still, if not a gulf, at least a line between them and Him; there is still something needed to be done and felt by them to effect the junction between them, and to draw out His riches. In other words, "they stumble at this stumbling stone." They will not, just as they are, take Him for just what He is. It is this "stumbling" that is keeping multitudes from peace. God's testimony concerning Jesus does not satisfy them. They, in fact, want another Saviour; for they insist that they must be different from what they are before they can expect Him to save them. Alas! "Who hath believed our report!"

IV. The stone of destruction. This is when He comes the second time. Just now the first part of his statement is fulfilling, "Whoso falleth on this stone shall be broken;" ere long the second part shall be fulfilled, "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." This is the falling of the mighty stone upon a Christ-rejecting world! This is the final ruin of unbelievers. This is the "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power." He comes not only to break his rejectors in pieces, like a potter's vessel; but to grind these pieces into powder. That day of destruction cometh! Christendom is preparing for it. The vine of the earth is fast ripening for the treading of the terrible vintage;--in the day of the vengeance of the Lord.

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